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Chairman: Mr. Sychou ..... (Belarus)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 62

Question of Antarctica

General debate, consideration of and action on draft resolution (A/51/390; A/C.1/51/L.55)

The Chairman: As members will recall, the question of Antarctica was included initially on the agenda of the General Assembly at its thirty-eighth session in 1983. Each succeeding session of the General Assembly has been seized of the question of Antarctica, an issue that has assumed global importance for the world today as well as for future generations.

Antarctica, its associated ecosystem and the Southern Ocean play a critical role in the global environmental system. While we have recently expanded our knowledge of the white continent, we are at the dawn of appreciating its full significance for our lives and for the intimate and unbreakable interdependence between Antarctica and the rest of the world.

Major processes of interaction between the atmosphere, oceans, ice and biota affect the entire global system through feedbacks, biogeochemical cycles, circulation patterns, transport of energy and pollutants and changes in ice mass balance.

Currently, the principal environmental concerns in Antarctica are related to changes occurring at a global level, rather than to those originating from human activities within Antarctica itself. Those considered of most significance relate to depletion of the ozone layer and climate change. It should be remembered, however, that it is only in the recent past that the Antarctic marine environment of whale and seal stocks has been exploited, leading to the near extinction of some species. While this exploitation has now ceased, its impact is still evident in the marine ecosystem today. In comparison to these and the global changes, the environmental impacts of human activities occurring within Antarctica today are relatively minor and localized. Even these remain of concern, however, because of the high scientific value of maintaining Antarctica, as far as possible, in its relatively undisturbed state.

Antarctica is the least populated and industrialized continent, with minimal human activity. Research has been conducted on the presence and transport of pollutants in Antarctic marine and terrestrial ecosystems. Levels in Antarctica are still generally extremely low, except at a few localized sites.

Long-range pollutants in Antarctica originate predominantly in the industrialized areas of the world. Many such pollutants are transported to Antarctica in the upper atmosphere, while others are transported to Antarctica by ocean currents. Air reaching Antarctica from outside has to pass through the zone of cyclonic storms that surrounds the continent. This acts as a filter, removing some of the particles and reactive gases from the air and depositing them in the Southern Ocean.

Due to minimal, localized human activity, Antarctica is an ideal laboratory in which to base monitoring activities

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for long-range pollutants. It is important that this scientific value of Antarctica not be destroyed through local sources of contamination.

In view of the extensive deliberations of the Committee on this subject over the past several years, it has become clear to us that Antarctica should forever be used exclusively for peaceful purposes, that it should remain free of armaments and military installations, and that it must not become a source of tension and discord.

I have tried in this brief statement to highlight the fact that the global importance of the Antarctic environment is such that its state needs to be assessed periodically and comprehensively. I welcome the initiative now being taken by the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research to develop proposals for a comprehensive report on the state of the Antarctic environment in the near future. Such a report would be appreciated as the Madrid Protocol comes up for ratification and would serve as a base for further work of the Antarctic Treaty system in protecting the Antarctic environment. I would like to draw the Committee's attention to the report of the Secretary-General, which provides comprehensive and detailed information on the subject matter, summarizing the two reports of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings that have taken place over the last two years.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): I wish to thank you, Sir, for your brief but comprehensive statement introducing the subject item under discussion, for which my delegation is most grateful.

My delegation is pleased that this Committee is again considering an agenda item that continues to be important: the question of Antarctica. After 14 years of consideration of this item in this Committee, my delegation is gratified that the international community now has a better understanding of this remote and pristine continent and of the need for collective efforts to protect this fragile and vulnerable environment for the common benefit of humankind.

My delegation appreciates and welcomes the report of the Secretary-General, contained in document A/51/390, and would like to commend the efforts of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) in preparing this comprehensive report. The report has provided the international community with invaluable information on the latest state of the Antarctic environment, highlighting both the positive and not-so-positive developments and impacts of increased human activities on this fragile continent. We hope that future reporting on the continent will be equally illuminating and transparent in the interest of increased understanding about what goes on on that continent.

Reports of this nature will go a long way in promoting understanding and cooperation between the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties and the rest of the international community not party to the Treaty. My delegation wishes to commend the Consultative Parties for their increasing preparedness in sharing important information about the activities in Antarctica with the non-Consultative Parties. We hope that this kind of sharing of information, while still ad hoc in nature, will become a regular feature of cooperation between the Consultative Parties and the general membership of the United Nations.

My delegation is pleased to note the increasing involvement of the United Nations, particularly of UNEP, in recent consultative meetings of the Consultative Parties. We note that, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 49/80 of 1994, the Executive Director of UNEP has been invited to attend the meetings of the Consultative Parties and we are also appreciative of the readiness of the Consultative Parties to provide the United Nations Secretary-General with information pertaining to the Nineteenth and Twentieth Consultative Meetings held at Seoul and Utrecht, respectively.

We note from the Secretary-General's report that pollution remains a major environmental problem in Antarctica due to the delicate ecosystem of the continent. The sources of this pollution come from increased human activity emanating mainly from the operation of research facilities, in particular the disposal of wastes by research stations, as well as from wastes resulting from abandoned stations, which over time have contributed to the environmental degradation of the continent.

My delegation also notes with some concern the dramatic growth in both the quantity and scope of Antarctic tourism. More than 60,000 tourists have visited the continent over the past 40 years and the number is growing rapidly in view of the lucrativeness of that commercial activity for some Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties. While Antarctic tourism may have a positive side in that it promotes increased knowledge of the general public about the continent, increased tourist activity, especially if unregulated, would lead to cumulative environmental impacts on the most frequently visited locations of Antarctica. Indeed, from available data, some of these locations in Antarctica have already begun to show the harmful effects of activities related to tourism.

There is therefore a need to assess the cumulative impact of frequent visits to those vulnerable regions of Antarctica, to standardize information gathering and monitoring and to take the necessary actions to protect the environmental integrity of those locations. It is our earnest hope that a prototype standard format for reporting Antarctic tourist data, as was agreed by the Consultative Parties at their Consultative Meeting at Utrecht in May this year, could be put into operation soon. Through such a reporting format, a comprehensive, consistent and accessible international database on Antarctic tourism could be developed that would enable the appropriate parties concerned to take measures to prevent or at least limit the damaging impact of tourism-related activities on the Antarctic environment.

In this regard, therefore, my delegation underscores the importance of the speedy ratification of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty so as to ensure early entry into force of that Protocol. My delegation and others in this Committee have, on several occasions in the past, stressed the importance of the Protocol and its ratification in the context of environmental protection of the continent. We welcome the ratification of the Protocol by the majority of Parties to the Treaty and urge the few remaining Consultative Parties to do so without further delay.

My delegation also attaches great importance to the undertaking, contained in chapter 17 of Agenda 21 of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, to ensure the access of the international community, particularly the scientific community and specialized United Nations agencies, to data arising from scientific research conducted by the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties in Antarctica. In this regard, my delegation welcomes the decision made at the Twentieth Consultative Meeting at Utrecht to undertake consultations with a view to producing an authoritative report on the state of the Antarctic environment. We hope that this report will be finalized at an early date and be made available to the United Nations.

My delegation is extremely pleased that, on the basis of consultations on this agenda item, it has been possible to reach an agreement on a consensus or Chairman's text of the draft resolution before this Committee. The text, largely an updating of resolution 49/80 of 15 December 1994, *inter alia*, welcomes the invitations to the Executive Director of UNEP to attend Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings in order to assist in their substantive work, and urges the Parties to continue to do so for future meetings. It also welcomes the practice whereby the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties provide information pertaining to these meetings and other relevant information on Antarctica so as to enable the Secretary-General to submit a report for the consideration of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, when this agenda item will be considered again.

My delegation wishes to express its thanks and appreciation to the delegations that have contributed to this effort, not just at this session, but also in the past. It goes without saying that the positive attitude and cooperative spirit of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties, as manifested by the delegations of the Netherlands and New Zealand, have also been a major contributing factor in bringing about a consensus draft resolution on this item this year. In thanking them for their spirit of accommodation in the current exercise, my delegation looks forward to continued cooperation with them in the future.

Mr. Biegman (Netherlands): I have the honour of addressing the First Committee on behalf of the States Parties to the Antarctic Treaty.

The last time the item "Question of Antarctica" was discussed by the General Assembly was at the forty-ninth session in 1994. On that occasion, the Assembly succeeded in adopting the resolution on the issue, resolution 49/80, without a vote. This represented a significant improvement on the situation that had existed since 1985, when the General Assembly had to vote on the Antarctica resolution. Therefore, the Antarctic Treaty Parties fully share the hope expressed by the representative of Malaysia that the consensus will be maintained and that the first Committee will adopt the draft resolution on the question of Antarctica without a vote. I would like to add that the delegations of New Zealand and the Netherlands in particular have greatly valued the cooperation in this respect of the delegation of Malaysia.

The Antarctic Treaty Parties are pleased that the Antarctic Treaty system has effectively met the challenges which arose in the past. We also believe that it has the capacity to continue to deal effectively with the issues relating to Antarctica in a manner that takes account the interests of all countries.

The Antarctic Treaty has been successful in ensuring that the entire Antarctic Treaty area be used exclusively for peaceful purposes, in particular for cooperation over scientific research and environmental protection. It has provided a framework for the development of a comprehensive and well-functioning cooperative

management regime for the area. This framework has been essential for facilitating vital scientific research on issues such as global climate change and the depletion of the ozone layer.

The Treaty has provided the basis for the development of rules on the environmental protection of the Antarctic which have been successful in keeping the continent virtually pristine. The adoption of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty in Madrid on 4 October 1991 was a landmark in this respect. The Protocol designates Antarctica as a natural reserve devoted to peace and science. It aims at the comprehensive protection of the Antarctic environment from all activities taking place there. In particular, it prohibits all mineral-resource activities, with the exception of those relating to scientific research.

Even though it has not yet entered into force, in practice the Protocol is already being applied in many respects, in particular through the work of the transitional environmental Working Group. This Working Group was created at the 1994 Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting at Kyoto to prepare for the establishment of the Committee for Environmental Protection foreseen by the Protocol.

Also in anticipation of the entry into force of the Protocol, there has been a noteworthy enhancement of the practice of exchanging and discussing information on environmental impact assessments of proposed activities. Furthermore, initiatives have been taken to clarify the implementation of environmental impact assessment obligations of the Protocol in order to harmonize national practices on this matter.

The present situation has not come about overnight. It is the product of a step-by-step process developed over the past 34 years of the successful operation of the Antarctic Treaty. The Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings are important steps in this process of constant progress. In 1995, such a meeting was held at Seoul, Republic of Korea, and in 1996 the city of Utrecht in the Netherlands hosted the Twentieth Consultative Meeting. Experts designated by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and other organizations participated in both meetings. UNEP and other organizations will also be invited to designate experts to attend the May 1997 Consultative Meeting at Christchurch, New Zealand, in order to assist the Meeting in its substantive work. Both meetings produced final reports, which were sent not only to the States Parties but, in keeping with resolution 49/80, also to UNEP. The Secretary-General has accorded UNEP a central role in preparing the Secretary-General's report, as requested by resolution 49/80. The report is contained in document A/51/390, which is dated 20 September 1996, but which was received only 10 days ago.

Resolution 49/80 clearly requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly information on developments in relation to Antarctica, as conveyed by the Antarctic Treaty Parties. Unfortunately, the report prepared by UNEP appears not to be entirely in line with that request. On the one hand, UNEP has interpreted its mandate more broadly and has incorporated information from a variety of sources. Yet, on the other hand, the report is incomplete. It fails, for example, to take account of the final report of the Twentieth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting held at Utrecht. No mention of that crucial report is made in the report of UNEP, which in relation to the Consultative Meeting confines itself to information distributed at the Meeting.

The Antarctic Treaty Parties wish to place on record that the Antarctica report that UNEP is to produce for the fifty-fourth General Assembly is that referred to in the present draft resolution. As the draft resolution makes clear, it should consist only of the information conveyed to the Secretary-General by the Treaty Parties.

At the 1995 Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting at Seoul, important steps were taken in the area of environmental monitoring: the adoption of checklists for the inspection of vessels and abandoned stations and of waste disposal sites. These checklists provide useful guidelines for carrying out inspections under article VII of the Antarctic Treaty and in assessing implementation of the provisions of the environmental Protocol.

Furthermore, at the initiative of the Netherlands, the Seoul Meeting put the safe management of radioactive waste on the Antarctic agenda, a subject which until then had not received the attention it deserved. Currently, negotiations are under way on the conclusion of a convention on the safe management of radioactive waste. At those negotiations, the Antarctic Treaty Parties have successfully cooperated in efforts to include an article that prohibits the storage and disposal of radioactive waste in the Antarctic Treaty area.

The 1996 Utrecht Consultative Meeting made progress on the further regulation of tourism, in particular by promoting effective self-regulation by the tourist industry. We should not underestimate the importance of this particular aspect. Antarctic tourism is on the increase,

which is, of course, of concern. The impact of tourism on the environment and on scientific research activities is monitored constantly. The entry into effect of the environmental Protocol will enhance this process. Like all other activities in Antarctica, tourism will be subject to strict regulations, including environmental impact assessments of proposed tourist activities.

Since the adoption of resolution 49/80 two years ago, there have also been other significant developments. In 1996, the Antarctic Treaty Parties were able to welcome the accession of the forty-third party to the Treaty: Turkey. Good progress was made towards the entry into force of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty, which we now expect in 1997. The Protocol has been ratified by 23 of the 26 Parties required for entry into force. The Antarctic Treaty Parties look forward to the entry into force of the Protocol and the further development of the system. One aspect of that will be the elaboration and adoption of an annex on liability to the Protocol, on which a group of legal experts has made good progress in the last two years.

To conclude, the Antarctic Treaty system is a system open to participation by all States. The Parties call upon all States wishing to become involved in activities in the Antarctic to participate in this effective system. In particular, the Parties call upon States carrying out activities in the Antarctic to accede to the Treaty and to the Protocol.

Mr. Parnohadiningrat (Indonesia): At the outset, allow me to express the appreciation of my delegation, Sir, for your introductory remarks in the deliberations of this Committee on the question of Antarctica.

The General Assembly has dealt with this question since it was inscribed on its agenda in 1983 and has discussed it every year. During this time, Member States that have participated in the deliberations have spoken on a wide range of issues surrounding that continent, especially its role and influence on the atmosphere, oceans, biological conditions of the entire global system and the fragility of its environment, which is vulnerable to the impact of human activities. The reports submitted by the Secretary-General in the past have rightly focused our attention on some of these aspects and contributed to the furthering of our understanding and knowledge of this continental wilderness.

It is therefore gratifying to note from his latest report, contained in A/51/390, that Antarctica continues to play a critical role as a centre for scientific programmes and for peaceful cooperation among States and in improving our understanding of its environment and its dependent and associated ecosystem. It confirms that the protection of Antarctica's scientific and environmental values must be accorded high priority. In this context, we hope that the Madrid Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty will soon be ratified by the relevant States so that its provisions will have full legal effect throughout the Antarctic area.

The report also draws our attention to a number of encouraging developments, including the intensification of inspection and enforcement by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, the continued monitoring of the Antarctic's ozone level, a growth in the databases of a number, size and significance to facilitate the comparability and accessibility of Antarctica's scientific data, and particularly the involvement of an increasing number of specialized agencies such as the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the World Health Organization. These have made significant contributions to our awareness of Antarctica's importance to the global and regional environment.

The report of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting held last year, as well as the information submitted at the Twentieth Consultative Meeting held in the Netherlands last May, have provided some pertinent details. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions made by a number of interested organizations, which have enhanced our knowledge of the Antarctic region. My delegation notes with particular appreciation the role played by the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition of non-governmental organizations with environmental, technical and scientific expertise in Antarctica and which monitors the various aspects of the Antarctic Treaty system. Its role should be further encouraged and promoted.

Indonesia remains hopeful that the spirit of cooperation between the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties and non-signatories will continue into the future so that we can build upon what has already been achieved in Antarctica. Such an approach will, hopefully, ensure the adoption of the draft resolution on this question by consensus.

Mr. Hanif (Pakistan): First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your opening remarks and the Ambassador of Malaysia for introducing the draft resolution.

As we all know, Antarctica is a unique ecosystem endowed with rich mineral resources, ideal conditions for scientific research, 90 per cent of the world's fresh water resources and rare species of flora and fauna. For optimal and environmentally friendly utilization of the complex ecosystem, the international community needs to have a shared vision of the continent — a vision to utilize and preserve Antarctica for the benefit of all mankind.

The Antarctic Treaty of 1959 was signed to achieve two objectives: to maintain Antarctica for peaceful uses only and to promote freedom of scientific investigation and international cooperation to that end. The Treaty has, to some extent, succeeded in achieving its objectives. The arms race was not allowed to spread to the continent and international cooperation for research was promoted.

With the cooperation and assistance of a number of friendly countries that are also members of the Antarctic Treaty system, Pakistan has launched a sustained and successful programme of research expeditions to the continent. As a staging point for these expeditions, our scientists have established the Jinnah research Station. A wide range of studies are being conducted from that base. Our studies are primarily focused on the ecology of the polar seas; the monitoring of weather conditions; the detection of trace matter in ice, the air and the sea and its environmental effects; and the geophysical mapping of the area around the Jinnah Station. The results of our findings shall be freely and openly available to the international community. We hope that other countries will do the same.

While the Antarctic Treaty has promoted peaceful and coordinated scientific research, it has no provisions addressing the most important concern: the preservation of the region. Even peaceful activities can have destabilizing consequences for the whole ecosystem. We are happy to note that, in recognition of these shortfalls in the Treaty, the Madrid Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty was adopted in 1991. Unfortunately, it has not come into force, as certain signatories have yet to ratify it.

Moreover, the Protocol bans prospecting and mining in and around Antarctica for only 50 years. It does not stipulate a procedure for assigning responsibility and liability for environmental damage. We hope that measures will be taken to remove these flaws and to convert this limited ban into a permanent one. Additional regimes should also be established to deal with multifarious activities being undertaken in Antarctica.

One of the activities that has threatened this fragile and critically important ecosystem is unregulated tourism. The growing number of tourists has placed increasing strains on Antarctica's ecological system. For example, during the last austral summer, there was a ratio of eight tourists to every three scientific personnel. Antarctica has no infrastructure to cope with tourism. It has been developed almost solely as a research base. While it is largely agreed that the environment is seriously endangered by tourist-related activities, no official agreements or treaties exist with regard to regulating the tourist industry.

The complexities of the issues are self-evident. To address the whole range of interrelated environmental, economic, scientific and security problems, a comprehensive approach needs to be adopted. In this regard, Pakistan welcomes the initiative proposed in the Secretary-General's report to prepare a comprehensive report on the state of the Antarctic environment.

There are a number of ideas being floated to save Antarctica, including a permanent moratorium on all mineral/oil negotiations and activities; the creation of an Antarctic environmental protection administration; and the establishment of world park areas. No matter which idea is pursued to its end, the ultimate goal should be to preserve and ensure that we can benefit from the vast resources of information in a peaceful and productive manner.

We need one place on Earth where all nations can cooperate on peaceful scientific research without harming its ecology. Antarctica could become one such sanctuary for wildlife and science, undisrupted by exploitation and unpolluted by politico-economic self-interest. Our Committee should endeavour to contribute to the realization of this goal.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): My delegation is happy to participate in the discussion on agenda item 62, entitled "Question of Antarctica". This is the first time that the issue is being addressed by the First Committee since the General Assembly resolution biennializing consideration of this item was adopted by consensus.

Antarctica has very appositely been described as part of the global commons and it is only natural that the world community should be concerned about and wish to be involved in decisions about its future. Antarctica's importance has long been recognized by the international community, including successive summit meetings of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. It is of vital significance and relevance to global climatic conditions and

the global environmental system, and the need to preserve its ecosystem is appreciated by all. Antarctica also affords, as the Secretary-General's report states, an

> "ideal stage on which to base monitoring activities for long- range pollutants" *(A/51/390, para. 114)*.

There can be no disagreement or discord about our objectives in Antarctica, namely, to conduct scientific research and to use the continent as a zone of international cooperation for peaceful purposes for the benefit of the peoples of the world.

My delegation is pleased that, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 49/80, the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme is being invited to attend the meetings of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties; there is thus greater interaction between the Parties and the United Nations system. We firmly believe that closer United Nations involvement would serve to supplement and strengthen efforts to deepen human knowledge about Antarctica and also make for greater transparency.

The Secretary-General's report on Antarctica contains some very useful information. We welcome the fact that, although the Madrid Protocol has not yet entered into full international legal effect, the States Parties have voluntarily agreed to implement the provisions of the agreement as it was adopted in 1991, to the extent practicable. It is also reassuring to learn that, because of the relevant provisions of the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the atmospheric growth rates of several major ozone-depleting substances have slowed. However, it is disquieting to note the recent statement by United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Climate Monitoring Laboratory that to reach the pre-ozone-hole levels of the late 1970s would take until around the middle of the next century. Therefore, we believe our efforts in this regard should continue with increased intensity.

My delegation is happy that, for the second time, we should be able to adopt a consensus draft resolution on Antarctica. My delegation thanks Malaysia for the introduction of the draft resolution this morning. We also hope that, in the coming years, there will be continued cooperation between members of the Antarctic Treaty system and other Member States of the United Nations in the promotion of objectives that we all share.

The Chairman: I have been informed by the Secretariat that there are no speakers in the general debate at this afternoon's meeting of the Committee. Thus, I should like to consult with members and propose that we take action on the draft resolution this morning. According to our timetable, we have set aside three meetings for this agenda item, but if there are no speakers I think it would be appropriate to proceed further at this morning's meeting and take action on the draft resolution. Are there any comments?

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): In light of the Chairman's statement this morning and the statements that have been made since, it is obvious that there is good reason to take action and conclude the discussion on this subject this morning without prolonging it further. My delegation seconds the Chairman's recommendation that we take action on the draft resolution this morning.

Mr. Biegman (Netherlands): I too would like to support the Chairman's suggestion that we take action on the draft resolution this morning. We fully agree with the representative of Malaysia.

The Chairman: If I hear no objection, therefore, I shall take that the Committee decides to take action on the draft resolution this morning.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: I should like to draw attention to the fact that a draft resolution has been submitted by the Chairman in document A/C.1/51/L.55. The Committee will therefore now proceed to take action on draft resolution A/C.1/51/L.55.

I should like to propose that the First Committee adopt the draft resolution without a vote. If I hear no objections, I shall take it that the Committee wishes to act accordingly.

Draft resolution A/C.1/51/L.55 was adopted.

The Chairman: The Committee has therefore concluded its consideration of agenda item 62, "Question of Antarctica".

Concluding statement by the Chairman

The Chairman: The work of the First Committee at the fifty-first session of the General Assembly has come to an end and I would like to take this opportunity to share

with members what I consider to be the main achievements of the session.

No doubt, this has been an eventful and, I should say, historic year in the field of disarmament. The long-awaited Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is now a reality. Within a short period of time, 144 States have already signed it. The sixty-fifth instrument of ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention has been deposited, triggering the mechanism for its entry into force. The African States have brought to a successful conclusion their long-standing efforts to eliminate the nuclear threat from their continent. The Treaty of Pelindaba, signed at Cairo on 11 April 1996, has given life to a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Africa. Those events combined should provide a strong impetus for the international community to continue its forward thrust towards creating a more peaceful and secure world.

The international community has entered a phase of intensive search for new avenues of progress in a world no longer dominated by the confrontational attitude and adversarial relations of the cold war era. There is a growing acceptance of the need to build confidence through openness and transparency as part of the process of disarmament, ensuring security for all States, large and small. However, the complexity of the notion of security compels Governments to strike a delicate balance between seemingly contradictory trends and poses a tremendous challenge to the international community as a whole.

This session of the First Committee has clearly demonstrated the readiness of Member States to rise to the challenge and for this I am grateful to all representatives who participated in its work. Discussions were conducted in a businesslike and cooperative atmosphere. Twenty-one resolutions adopted without a vote are, to my mind, proof of this. On those resolutions which eluded consensus, Member States engaged in earnest efforts to minimize the differences and highlight the common ground. That spirit of cooperation made my job as Chairman much easier. I thank all members for that.

The opening for signature of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty on 24 September has had the most positive impact on this session of the General Assembly in general and of the First Committee in particular. I am indeed happy to note that the Preparatory Commission for the CTBT organization made some progress towards laying down the foundation of the CTBT regime. I hope that this will bode well for the future of this Treaty and that the serious problems it encountered in its elaboration will be resolved before too long.

I cannot but express my satisfaction with the new developments in the field of chemical weapons. On 29 April 1997, the Chemical Weapons Convention will enter into force. This is a welcome and long overdue achievement. It was no surprise, therefore, that, after a two-year absence, the resolution on chemical weapons made a triumphant return and was adopted by the Committee by consensus. It was not an easy task. It required compromise and cooperation on the part of Member States, which, in paving the way to its unanimous adoption, showed goodwill and a responsible approach.

This year, with the signing of the Pelindaba Treaty, and a number of persistent calls being made for the creation of new zones in various regions of the world, the issue of nuclear-weapon-free zones has acquired a prominent place on the disarmament agenda of the international community. The establishment of such zones had always been considered a "second front" of nuclear disarmament and it is with satisfaction that we witness this turn of events. An overwhelming majority of States strongly supports the establishment of such zones and believes that the experiences of other, long-standing nuclear-weapon-free zones could be helpful in the elaboration and creation of the new ones. In fact, as members know, this issue will be discussed by the United Nations Disarmament Commission when it meets in 1997 and I hope that Member States will give this item their full attention and support.

While I am on the topic of nuclear-weapon-free zones, I should like to mention specifically draft resolution A/C.1/51/L.28/Rev.1 on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East. As at the past 16 sessions, this draft resolution was again adopted without a vote. We all know and understand fully the problems of the States of the region in this difficult and sensitive area. Despite differences in approach to the practical aspects of the zone, in particular the timing of specific actions for its establishment, and the differences which seriously threatened the achievement of consensus, it was very gratifying for me to see that the long-term interest of the States concerned ultimately prevailed and enabled the adoption of the draft resolution without a vote.

Whether judged quantitatively, by the sheer number of resolutions, or qualitatively, by the force of the passion they stirred, nuclear disarmament issues were once again the centre of the debates in the Committee this year. Some elements of this complex issue have been on the

Committee's agenda for a long time. Others have appeared more recently. I would like to mention in particular the resolution on the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice. Despite the fact that different groups of States placed emphasis on different elements of the Court's pronouncements, there was one issue on which I, for one, could not detect any divergence of views. There was total agreement that further vigorous measures for nuclear disarmament were necessary. Without such broad and general agreement, we can have no hope for success in the future.

The achievement of the Russian Federation and the United States in implementing agreed reductions under START I and their readiness to continue this process with a new set of reductions under START II are to be commended. I believe that these have all been steps forward in the nuclear disarmament process. But this in itself is not enough. More is needed and expected. However, there are certain differences on how States want to continue the forward movement. Some States emphasized a step-by-step approach, with the conclusion of a cut-off convention as the next step, and others suggested strongly that multilateral negotiations should begin on a phased programme of nuclear disarmament, which should include the notion of a time-bound framework. I very much hope that these divergences will not stall the process altogether, particularly not in the Conference on Disarmament.

Although, as I have said, the complex issues of nuclear disarmament have continued to occupy centre stage in our debates and will no doubt continue to remain the focus of multilateral disarmament efforts, during the past few years the world has also begun to take note of the destructive capacity of conventional weapons. We have seen with remarkable clarity what they can do. Much has been written about anti-personnel landmines. These horrendous weapons, which, by their indiscriminate nature, kill and maim without regard, have been compared to weapons of mass destruction. While countries continue to consider landmines a necessary component of their defence, the magnitude of the damage caused by these weapons cannot be overlooked. I believe that the humanitarian aspect of this problem should outweigh all other considerations. I know that this view is shared by the Committee, which overwhelmingly supported draft resolution A/C.1/51/L.46 on an international agreement to ban anti-personnel landmines.

This brings me to the subject of disarmament efforts at the regional and subregional levels. Two draft resolutions were adopted on this subject. They pursue clearly defined objectives: to formulate the principles that can serve as a framework for regional agreements on conventional arms control in an atmosphere of the non-proliferation of weapons and the strengthening of confidence-building measures. All activities at the regional and subregional levels should be aimed at easing regional tensions and promoting regional and international peace and security.

While I am on the subject of regional and subregional disarmament and the question of conventional weapons, I should like to make an observation of a general nature. At this session, issues relating to non-proliferation — and not only the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons — have gained considerable prominence. I believe that this is an accurate reflection of the sources of instability that preoccupy the majority of Governments. The problem is that the indiscriminate proliferation of all types of weapons does not take place in a vacuum. It is invariably accompanied by an increase in terrorism, drug trafficking and aggressive separatism, with all the negative consequences that these bring about.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the draft resolution on the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. Although the Committee was not able to adopt this draft resolution by consensus, speaking personally, I am not discouraged by the outcome. I strongly believe that if the issues of proper preparations, including the question of the agenda and the definition of the session's objectives, are properly resolved, consensus could be attained. I hope that, at the forthcoming session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission, Member States will continue to work towards reaching common understandings. The Disarmament Commission has already laid the groundwork to carry further the successful deliberations on the issue of creating a cooperative atmosphere. Of course, for this to happen, the view of each Member State should be carefully considered. If this session is to become a bridge to the twenty-first century, then it should carry everyone along.

Before concluding my remarks, I should like to say a few words about the organizational aspects of the Committee's work. After four years of efforts to rationalize the work of the First Committee, the procedural aspects have finally caught the attention of delegations. It seems to me that the thematic, structured discussions have not produced the desired results. In my opinion, a new approach is called for. One such possible approach might be to link structured discussion to the specific topics covered by various draft resolutions, which could be submitted earlier in the work of the Committee. I

understand that such changes should be thoroughly discussed among the members of the Committee. Nevertheless, we are living at a time when innovative approaches should be encouraged. I will therefore take the liberty of making this proposal to the new Bureau of the Committee at the fifty-second session.

In conclusion, I should like to express my thanks and deep gratitude to all members for the cooperation and support they have extended to me personally and as the Chairman of this Committee throughout the session. Without their goodwill and serious participation, we could not have achieved the carefully crafted results that we accomplished. It has been a privilege and an honour to serve them as the Chairman of this Committee. I should also like to thank the Vice-Chairmen and other members of the Bureau, who encouraged me with their wise counsel and help.

I wish to express special gratitude to the Director of the Centre for Disarmament Affairs, to the Secretary of the First Committee, Mr. Lin Kuo-Chung, and to all his colleagues who serve in the Secretariat. This was his first year as Secretary of this body. He handled his task with skill and good humour. His knowledge of disarmament in general and the specific characteristics of the First Committee in particular made his contribution to the overall success of our work very useful. I should like thank the staff of the Secretariat, the teams of interpreters and the conference officers, who served the Committee with devotion and distinction.

Statements of thanks

Mr. Čalovski (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): In my capacity as Chairman of the Eastern European Group of States for the month of November, I should like, on behalf of the delegations of the Eastern European States, to thank you, Sir, for your leadership in ending the work of the First Committee earlier than expected and very successfully. Your wide knowledge, diplomatic experience and very kind personality were very important for the success and fruitful work of the Committee.

I should like also to thank the Vice-Chairmen and the Rapporteur for their contribution to the work of the Committee, as well as all members of the Secretariat, including the Director of the Centre for Disarmament Affairs, my friend Mr. Davinic, and the Secretary of the Committee, Mr. Lin Kuo-Chung, for their very professional work and for the help they have always extended to all of us.

Many thanks also to the interpreters, the conference officers and, indeed, everybody who was involved in ensuring the successful conclusion of the work of the Committee.

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the delegations of our Group, I wish you all the best in your future professional activities and in your personal life. I am sure that the friendship we have established will continue.

Mr. García (Colombia) *(interpretation from Spanish)*: On behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, I wish to express our gratitude for the manner in which you, Sir, have guided the deliberations of the Committee. The transparency and good faith with which you presided over our deliberations contributed to creating an atmosphere of trust which led to the achievement of several important agreements during the course of our discussions.

Through you, Sir, I should also like to express our gratitude to the Director of the Centre for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Davinic, to the members of the Secretariat, to Mr. Lin Kuo-Chung and to the other colleagues who have supported him during the course of this session.

May I also express our thanks to the conference officers, the interpreters and all the administrative staff who have contributed to the successful conclusion of this session.

Mr. Houansou (Benin) *(interpretation from French)*: Naturally, my delegation would like to associate itself with the statement of thanks just made by the delegation of Colombia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, to which my delegation belongs.

My delegation is interested in the text of the Chairman's concluding statement. We wonder whether it would be possible for us to have that text made available to us.

The Chairman: I do not see any problem in providing copies of my concluding statement.

Mr. Wrabetz (Austria): In the name of the Group of Western European and Other States, I should like to thank you, Sir, for the excellent job you have done and the excellent leadership that you have exercised over the

Committee and which helped us to bring our deliberations to a successful and early conclusion.

I would also extend our gratitude to the Bureau and to the members of the Secretariat who helped you in discharging your responsibilities. I wish to thank the interpreters and everybody else who helped us to conclude our work.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): As the Chairman of the Asian Group seems to have stepped out, in my capacity as the last Chairman of the Asian Group, I would like to join other representatives in expressing our thanks and gratitude to you, Mr. Chairman, for the way in which you have conducted our meetings. Your cool, quiet professionalism has paid off and we have ended our session earlier than expected. Our thanks to you and our best wishes in your future undertakings.

I should also like to thank Mr. Davinic, Mr. Lin Kuo-Chung, members of the Secretariat, the Rapporteur and everyone who has facilitated the smooth work of the First Committee.

The Chairman: Once again, I would like to thank the Committee for its cooperation and support. I look forward to our future cooperation and further activities.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.